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ABSTRACT

This paper begins by examining various aspects of children's and young people's reading ability and the new media, including children's media use and ownership, as well as multicultural aspects. The way public libraries see their role in the teaching of media skills is then considered, including well-developed reading ability as a prerequisite of media skills competence, providing media access and teaching media skills, and library policy positions; the statistics on the library provision of new media with special reference to service for children and young people are also discussed. The following principles of media education activity in children's libraries are summarized: a play-centered approach; an activity-centered approach with emphasis on the child's own actions; the integration of all media forms; and the presentation of the library's media range. It is noted that the variety of media skills teaching activities in children's libraries far outshines actual media provision, and several practical examples are provided, including the creation of special links lists for children in the Internet, creative activities for getting to know new media forms, and creative activities for new media production. (MES)

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Reading ability and the New Technology - Developments in Germany

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Abstract

We want to begin our talk by examining various aspects of children´s and young people´s reading ability and their use of the new media CD-ROM and the Internet. We will then consider the way public libraries see their role in the teaching of media skills and take a look at the statistics on the library provision of new media with special reference to services for children and young people. At present the sheer variety of media skills teaching activities in children´s libraries far outshines actual media provision and we will be showing several practical examples of this.

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Paper

1. Children and media use

New media use by children is a many-facetted phenomenon. Constant change and development in media choice and availability exert a permanent influence on media behaviour, not only in children. An essential part of children´s leisure activity consists in the use of all kinds of media. Books and reading form an integral part of this media mix, although print does not per se assume a pre-eminent position. Books are not necessarily „better" than other media,

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indeed some children may find access to books more difficult than to audiovisual or electronic media, according to the stage of their individual development.

As you can see from the following table, children are not only media users, they are also media owners:

Children´s media use and ownership.

Table: Children´s media ownership (exclusive) 1995[1]
By sex and age-group

Medium	Boys	Girls	6-9 years	10-11 years	12-13 years	Total
Walkman/ Cassette recorder	79	79	74	82	87	79
Radio	70	63	52	75	83	66
Record or CD player	32	37	12	42	67	34
Stereo equipment	28	31	10	36	58	29
Television	19	13	8	18	30	16
Computer	11	11	8	9	18	11
Video recorder	5	3	1	5	7	4
At least 6 of the above	3	4	1	3	8	3
None of the above	14	17	20	14	8	15

As this table shows, here in Germany - and the same can almost certainly be said of the other Western industrial nations - we can assume that a comprehensive and constantly increasing selection of media playback equipment is to be found in children´s bedrooms. Also to be borne in mind are of course the opportunities children have of using other pieces of equipment owned by the family. The ownership of playback equipment enables children to choose when and how to use it. The stock of the children´s library is of particular importance in those areas where children themselves determine programme content and combination, as in the case of the cassette recorder, walkman, PC player and computer, as opposed to the ready-made packages of radio and television; library holdings can cover a wide qualitative spectrum and help guide children through the vast selection available.

Multicultural aspects

About 7 million persons of non-German background (8,5% of the population) live in Germany. In the immediate vicinity of individual libraries the proportion of foreigners is even higher. For many children´s libraries this means users whose parents come from many different countries. These groups of non-nationals are often considerably less homogenous than was the case ten years ago. Libraries are confronted with rapid fluctuations in the nationalities and languages of resident refugees. Children´s language skills are as varied as their backgrounds. Although it could be assumed until recently that the children of non-German parents would aquire a knowledge of the German language by the time they started school at nursery level, it was found last year in Berlin that this was no longer the case. The size of the foreign communities - especially the Turkish community which numbers about 150,000 members - and the discontinuation of language teaching programmes have led to a situation in which children no longer learn German automatically, as it were. Language tests among first-years have further revealed that a considerable number of German children from socially disadvantaged families are unable to express themselves adequately. The studies showed that language problems were often accompanied by a family indifference to education. Observations made during the Berlin children´s libraries´ Multimedia Week in the autumn of 1998 confirmed that though many children own game consoles, few possess a PC and libraries can therefore play an important role in providing children with access to information

technology.

2. The role of the library and opportunities for action

We must ask ourselves what role public libraries can play in view of the challenge presented by the new technology and how they themselves see this role.

Well-developed reading ability as a pre-requisite of media skills competence

Libraries must pay particular attention to the development of reading ability, since this is an essential pre-requisite to the achievement of competence in media skills. The term „media competence" has itself many varied meanings, as a recent publication of the Ministry of Education implies: „Competence in media use does not simply mean the acquisition of technical skills. Of much greater importance is the ability to trace information quickly, to select and evaluate it appropriately and to apply it advantageously. We must not allow society to be split into those with media access and those without".[2] This requirement was by no means first voiced with the advent of the new media CD ROM and the internet. It arose in conjunction with research into the knowledge gap conducted in the 1970s.

Providing media access and teaching media skills

Media skills can be acquired not only within the educational system but also during leisure activities. Alongside the important role played in media instruction within the leisure sector by youth organisations outside the school, libraries, too, have a tradition of media educational activity.

This media educational activity on the part of libraries aims to supplement the media knowledge already acquired by children and young people in the course of their daily experience, with particular emphasis on a structured approach to media content, presentation and effect. Public libraries have always seen themselves in the function of intermediary. Their aim is not only to compensate for unequal opportunities among their (potential) clientele and ensure fair access to all media forms (indeed they feel under an obligation to do so) ; they must also liaise with schools and youth education organisations.

Library policy positions

The Federation of German Library Associations has outlined the role of public libraries in the teaching of media skills in its paper „Libraries ´93" [3] as follows:

- Guidance in media choice and the establishment of links between electronic and print media through the provision of multimedia facilities.
- Freely available access to all forms of information technology with especial emphasis on new media; the library should challenge its users to creative media use.
- The encouragement of reading skills through the provision of appropriate media and cooperation with schools, nursery schools and other organisations responsible for reading instruction.

In order to achieve these aims public libraries must be able to offer 20% of their stock in the form of audio-visual and electronic or digital media. In actual fact, in 1997 only 6,6% of total public library stock and 11% of children´s library or department stock was in this form.

In its policy paper „Library work with children" the German Library Institute´s Commission on Children´s and Young People´s Libraries described the task of children´s libraries in the promotion of media skills thus: „For many of those children without access to electronic media in the home the library represents the sole opportunity of gaining media experience. The library is responsible for examining the available material, making it available and offering

guidance on usage. This is the only way a child can learn to use these media for his or her own autonomous, goal-oriented ends. Children´s libraries are under an even greater obligation than schools and other organisations to provide access to the entire media spectrum".[4]

Reality (Statistics)

In view of the inadequacy of school library provision and access to new forms of information technology public libraries have a particularly important role to play. In the spring of 1998 only 6,500 of a total of 43,000 schools were online (15%) and 41 pupils had to share each computer (in the USA there was one computer to every 16 pupils).

Public libraries in Germany are well on the way to integrating access to many media forms into the services they offer. Alongside books and periodicals, which will naturally continue to form the core of library provision, large numbers of audio cassettes, videos and CDs are available in children´s libraries. In addition to these there has been an increase in the past 2-3 years in the provision of CD-ROMs and internet services. The latest statistical survey, dating from the end of the year 1997, revealed that CD-ROMs, which represented only about 1% of non-book materials in children´s libraries, played a minimal role. At the time of the survey 13,7% of libraries made software available to children, twice as many offered a software service to adult users. Those libraries offering software services to children held on average 50 CD-ROMs or children´s software on floppy disk (holdings for adult users: 195).

By providing work-stations for the use of CD-ROMs and internet, libraries can ensure that these new media are made available to those children who have no access to them at home or in school. At the end of 1997 only one library in twenty (5.1%) offered CD-ROM access and only one in 50 (1.8%) internet access in the children´s department (adult provision: CD-ROM 15.6%, internet 9.7%). A total of 133 CD-ROM and 39 internet work-stations were available to children. Only a small number of libraries had more than one work-station for children (CD-ROM work-stations: about 20 libraries; internet work-stations: scarcely 10).

It is thus obvious that children´s libraries have not played a leading role in the establishment of electronic media services in the public library sector. There is clearly a need for action if children´s libraries are to make rapid progress along the path they have already adopted towards the fulfilment of their media skills teaching aims.

In view of the recognized deficit in schools and public libraries the President of the Federal Republic, Roman Herzog, called for a concerted effort on the part of both the state and the business sector during an education conference in April 1999:

„Our aim must be to equip all German classrooms and public libraries with a sufficient number of networked computers within the next five years".[5]

3. The teaching of media skills - children´s libraries in practice

The principles of media education activity in children´s libraries

It is of prime importance in the work of children´s libraries that all obtainable media forms not only be made available for loan but that they form an active part of the libraries´events programme. A number of media educational programmes are at present running as models or pilot projects, we shall be looking at some of them later.

The range of projects presently on trial in individual German children´s libraries is very much wider than might be supposed from the modest levels of equipment provision. All kinds of activities connected with the new media have been initiated by children´s libraries, often in cooperation with partners and sponsors such as computer schools, computer companies or software producers, who often provide the necessary hard and software for the event itself and

sometimes beyond it. These events exemplify the possibilities afforded by the new media and thus underline the necessity of adequate provision in children´s libraries.

Libraries´ initiatives in the media education field are generally activity-centred, i.e. focussed on the child´s own actions. In the course of designing or producing books, videos, spoken drama or web pages children learn to recognize structural characteristcs, stylistic tools and production methods, all of which help them to learn to use the media with confidence. The aim is to teach children to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of the individual media forms and the appropriate uses to which they can be put, and to decide which form is best suited to the purpose in hand.

The principles are briefly (Transparency):

- a play-centred approach
- an activity-centred approach with the emphasis on the child´s own actions
- the integration of all media forms
- the presentation of the library´s media range

Three directions in media educational activitties in children´s libraries:

I. Creation of special links lists for children on the internet
II. Creative activities - getting to know new media forms
III. Creative activities - new media production

I. The creation of special link lists for children on the internet

Link lists are the modern electronic form of a service libraries have always provided: collecting media, material and information, indexing it and making it easily available to the user for his or her individual use. A number of children´s libraries are already active in this field and the fact that the same sites crop up in their links lists is certainly no coincidence.

Examples

Cologne City library
http://www.stbib-koeln.de/kids/ie3/index.htm

Ludwigsburg City library
http://www.lb.shuttle.de/stadtbibliothek/kidshome.htm

ZLB/AGB Halle´s Comet Young People´s Library
http://www.spinnenwerk.de/jiz/katalog.htm
Extremely comprehensive links lists on youth-related subjects: TELEVISION & FILM, MUSIC SCENE, THE WORLD OF FASHION, HISTORY, JUST NATURE, SPORT LIVE; THE FANTASTIC UNIVERSE; WORTH KNOWING:

Centrally produced link lists for children

The internet is predestined for the cooperative or, even better, the central production of link lists for children´s libraries. Stuttgart University Library and Information School´s Institute for Applied Research into Children´s Media has made a start with its Multikids site (http://machno.hbi-stuttgart.de/fak/multikids/), which incorporates all significant supraregional children´s links. Individual libraries are thus able to limit their efforts to supplementing these with local and regional links.

II. Creative activities - getting to know new media forms

Media rallies

Fairytale Media Rally (e.g. Stuttgart City Library)

The aim of the rally is to acquaint children with the various media forms on offer in the library. The children are required to use various media at a number of different work-stations to solve puzzles or particular problems.

Audiocassette with puzzle story (The witch and the 7 little frogs), combining several different fairytales which the children have to identify.

Fairytale CD-ROM (Snow White and the seven Hansels, Tivola). A history question has to be answered.

Fairytale puzzle. A puzzle has to be fitted together and a question anwered.

Complete a story starting with the beginning of a well-known fairytale.

Feely-box with fairytale objects which have to be used to identify the tales.

A variation on this idea is the computer rally, during which the various computer functions can be tried out at the different work-stations: OPAC search, word-processing, finding information on CD-ROM and the internet and a computer puzzle on paper.

Media Night

(Example from the Children´s and Young People´s Libraries of Berlin - 6 participating libraries)

Reading nights have become one of the most popular reading promotion activities in children´s libraries. [6] The children spend the whole night in the library together with the library staff, reading together - often ghost stories - with additional activities to bring the stories to life. Last autumn the reading night was expanded into a media night for the first time.

Children have the opportunity to explore a particular subject by means of various games and puzzles on CD-ROM and in books. The subject was the ghost Boggart from the book "The Boggart" by Susan Cooper, in which the Boggart gets caught up in a computer game by mistake. The media night was organized along the lines of a computer game: the players had to solve problems. The children had to combine various objects and solutions to complete the game successfully. At the end of the event the ghost was dispatched back to Scotland via the internet. The children had to solve various problems in books and on CD-ROMS, e.g. they had to find the plan of a mediaeval castle watch-tower and collect objects needed to send the ghost home. At midnight the children from all six libraries met in the chat room to bid the ghost farewell in Gaelic. They had looked up the Gaelic for „goodbye"on the CD-ROM encyclopaedia „Encarta" and had used a route-planner to find out the best way of getting from Berlin to Scotland, to prevent the ghost getting lost again.

III. Creative activities - new media production

Virtual city tours

The „Multimedia in schools" project

(Example: Göppingen City Library)

Getting to know the local city was the task set to 5th and 8th year children on this project in February 1997. The city library, a media education institution and an internet provider

collaborated on this event, the aim of which was to produce an electronic school newspaper.[7] The schoolgirls and boys explored the following local places of interest , visiting the actual sites and looking at the way they were presented in the media provided by the city library (books, newspapers, the internet): the Natural History Museum, the Jewish Museum, the City Library, the Zoo, the Reserve Police and various leisure and sporting venues. They used the information they had gathered to write texts, paint pictures and make photos and puzzles which were published both on the internet and in print form.

CD-ROM workshops

The basic idea of the workshop, which was organized by a children´s software publishing company in collaboration with children´s libraries, was to explain to children how animation works, in other words „How do I get a figure from the printed page into my computer?" and „What do I have to do to get the figure to come to life on the screen?" The best way to explain the production process to children proved to be to compare it to flip picture-books.

The aim of the workshop was to enable the children to make something they could take home at the end of the workshop - their own home-made CD-ROM. The libraries organized a competition in which school classes produced flip picture-books which served as the graphics basis for computer animations. The winners were invited to come to a programming workshop organized by the Tivola Publishing Company, where they could see how publishing staff used their ideas and designs to develop computer animation scenes.

Internet reporters (Chilias)

(Example: Stuttgart City Library)

The City Library internet reporters designed their own internet pages. The participants of the two-day workshop wrote text and produced illustrations on a particular subject, e.g. Children present their favourite books, or Children present the local city sights, using the children´s library stock. Each child was then able to scan and process his or her own picture under supervision and afterwards to design his or her own web page with the help of a web editor. The text was then entered, a collective home page designed and the individual web pages linked up to each other. [8]

Notes:

1 From: Weiler, Stefan: Computernutzung und Fernsehkonsum von Kindern. Ergebnisse qualitativ-empirischer Studien 1993 und 1995. (Computer use and television viewing patterns among children. The results of qualitative empirical studies in 1993 and 1995). In: Media Perspektiven 1/97, p.43-53, here p.45.

2 Multimedia möglich machen. Deutschlands Weg in die Wissensgesellschaft. (Making multimedia possible. Germany en route to the information society). BMBF. URL: http://www.iid.de/mmm_bmbf/index.html

3 Bibliotheken ´93. Strukturen - Aufgaben - Positionen (Libraries ´93. Structures, tasks, policies) / Bundesvereinigung deutscher Bibliotheksverbände. Berlin ; Göttingen, 1994.

4. Bibliotheksarbeit für Kinder. Ein Positionspapier (Library work with children. A policy paper) / Kommission des DBI für Kinder- und Jugendbibliotheken. Berlin: DBI, 1997, p.14.

5 http://www.welt.de/extra/dokumentation/reden/990414herzog.htm

6 e.g. Nordenham Town Library´s Titanic Night: http://www.bra.shuttle.de/stbue-nordenham/titan.htm

7 Comprehensive project documentation at http://www.stabifto.de/proj0297/index.htm. Further projects of this kind: „Kufior" (http://www.stuttgart.de/chilias -click on „Unsere Stadt" (our town) in the left-hand bottom frame and „Emil and the detectives" (http://zlb.de/projekte/kaestner)

8 Sample page: http://www.stuttgart.de/chilias/literatur/act/reporter/lilian.htm

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